

# TVA nominees questioned, senator threatens to stall confirmation

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WASHINGTON - The six nominees President Bush picked to serve on the expanded Tennessee Valley Authority board faced Senate questioning Wednesday, with one lawmaker threatening to hold up their confirmation if his state is not represented.

Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson said he is upset none of the nominees are from his state of Georgia, where 10 counties are served by TVA.

"My constituents must rely on TVA, and they deserve a voice on that governing board," Isakson said.

Congress recently passed a law requiring the TVA board to have nine part-time members instead of three full-time ones. Isakson said he plans to introduce legislation expanding the board to include 13 members and adding a requirement that there be one from each of the seven states served by TVA.

Isakson said he would block the nominees' confirmation, as any senator can do, until receiving a commitment from Senate leaders that they will address his concerns. That could mean taking up his legislation or getting the TVA board to offer solutions, according to Isakson spokeswoman Joan Kirchner.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist will work with Isakson to address his concerns while ensuring the nominees get confirmed quickly, said Matt Lehigh, a Frist spokesman.

Frist, a Tennessee Republican, sponsored the bill expanding the TVA board and touted its importance Wednesday. "I worked hard to pass legislation to modernize TVA's board of directors, because I believed TVA needed leaders with more business and management experience," Frist said.

Kentucky Republican Sens. Mitch McConnell and Jim Bunning raised concerns about TVA's rates during the Environment and Public Works Committee hearing. They said TVA customers in Kentucky pay more than people who are served by other power providers.

"Kentuckians are just not very happy with TVA," McConnell said.

Both McConnell and Bunning backed the board nomination of Mike Duncan, an eastern Kentucky banker and Republican National Committee lawyer.

Sen. Jim Jeffords, a Vermont independent, raised concerns about TVA's \$25.6 billion long-term debt.

That is "something that needs to be addressed by this board," said nominee Howard Thrailkill, a Huntsville, Ala. businessman.

TVA announced Monday that it had a plan to reduce the self-financing agency's debt to \$18.4 billion by 2016, starting with a \$340 million principal reduction in 2006 and a \$529 million reduction in 2007.

Jeffords also elicited a pledge from nominee Susan Williams of Knoxville, Tenn., to consider boosting TVA's reliance on environmentally friendly renewable energy.

"I think it should be increased," Williams said.

Less than 2 percent of TVA's power is from renewable sources such as wind or solar energy.

The other nominees going before the committee Wednesday were Dennis Bottorff, of Nashville, Tenn.; William Sansom, of Knoxville, Tenn.; and Donald DePriest, of Columbus, Miss.

The two current members of TVA's board, Bill Baxter and Skila Harris, are staying on the job. President Bush still must make one more nomination to complete the nine-member group. There is speculation that nominee may come from the Memphis area.

Once the expanded board is up and running, it will have to name a chairman. Shortly thereafter, the board will must hire a chief executive officer.

Headquartered in Knoxville, TVA provides electricity to 8.5 million people in Tennessee and parts of Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. The New Deal-era agency also has an economic development component and manages the 652-mile Tennessee River system for flood control, navigation, resource protection and recreational uses.